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## Security in the Concert Industry

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## Security in the Concert Industry

By Rebeca Zepeda

Security is a growing concern in all businesses but particularly one that cannot wait is the live music industry. Paris, Orlando, Manchester, and very recently, Las Vegas, are just some of the cities that have been afflicted by the lack of security measures in the live events scene. Without proper security in venues where music and entertainment is the main draw, tragedies such as the ones that have taken place in the past few years will continue to happen. It is the obligation of the venue and the artists to make sure that all guests are safe in the place they have chosen to enjoy live music. In the wake of these tragedies, security is a concern that must be addressed and acted upon immediately.

While many larger venues such as arenas or stadiums can afford to purchase better security equipment and hire more security personnel, it is much harder for independently owned or smaller venues to afford higher security measures. Peter Kasis, owner of management company, Deckstar, commented about the 2015 Bataclan shooting in Paris:

“Probably one of the biggest reasons the small club was targeted [in Paris] was the lack of metal detectors at the doors. It seems like you could almost make just as much impact killing 100 people as you could have killing 1,000. So that’s scary. A lot of smaller venues can’t really afford that kind of security. Profits at club shows are pretty thin as it is. It’s difficult for everybody to step up, but people are going to have to find ways to make these events more secure.”<sup>1</sup>

As Mr. Kasis states, not only is security a major issue that smaller venues need to address, but it is an issue that makes concert-goers that much more unlikely to go to a concert. Rising ticket prices, scalping and now limited security is not a combination that will convenience fans to go to a show nor is it an experience that will make venues any more profitable. A large portion of performing artist revenue comes from touring, which means that they cannot afford to lose fans at a show. Inadequate security measures and precautions will most likely detour fans from coming to a show – a trend that could have severe consequences on the music industry as a whole.

Though higher security measures are harder for smaller venues to comply with, it is the larger venues that must be especially vigilant in their security measures as they have an influx of thousands more people entering their premises which makes it harder and more time-consuming to screen each person individually. Screening and security technologies are not the only concerns for larger venues, however, as we saw at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in 2017. This attack was incredibly unpredictable because there was no need for the attacker to gain entrance into the venue at all – instead they waited until the show was over and the crowd poured out from the arena. We also saw this unpredictability at the Las Vegas, Route 91 Harvest Festival, where the shooter aimed at attendees from the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor of a hotel across from the outdoor festival grounds. Allocating funds to increase security outside venues and surrounding perimeters is certainly something we have learned from the Manchester attack. However, it is policy reform

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<sup>1</sup> Knopper, Steve. *Rolling Stone*, December 2015.

that is now imperative to the music industry. Unpredictable situations like the Las Vegas shooting all lead back to gun control or the lack thereof and it is now making its way into the music industry.

In the wake of the many tragedies that have plagued the music industry as the result of gun violence, many pop artists have openly spoke about lobbying for gun control. This was made evident in an open letter to Congress last year after the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, published through *Billboard*, which was reprinted after the Las Vegas attack. The letter, titled, “An Open Letter to Congress: Stop Gun Violence Now”, in part, reads:

“Music always has been celebrated communally, on dancefloors and at concert halls. But this life - affirming ritual, like so many other daily experiences – going to school or church or work – now is threatened, because of gun violence in this country... We call on Congress to do more to prevent the gun violence that kills more than 90 Americans every day and injures hundreds more, including: Require a background check for every gun sale, Block suspected terrorists from buying guns. *Billboard* and the undersigned implore you – the people who are elected to represent us – to close the deadly loopholes that put the lives of so many music fans, and all of us at risk.”<sup>2</sup>

After the letter ends, the signatures of nearly 200 pop artists and music industry executives are shown below in support of the letter’s call to action. However, many country artists’ signatures were not seen in support of the letter.

The Las Vegas, Route 91 Festival included a number of country artists such as Jason Aldean, Eric Church, and Sam Hunt: some of the most prominent figures in country music today. Country music and artists have often been associated with supporting the Second Amendment and as a result, have been involved with the National Rifle Association (NRA) and their music related events. NRA Country is a brand under the NRA that was founded, in their own words to “bring country music artists together with NRA members in support of our Second Amendment freedoms and hunting heritage,” according to Jonathan Bernstein of *The Guardian*.<sup>3</sup> Artists such as Hank Williams Jr. and Florida Georgia Line have often performed at the NRA’s music-affiliated events. In light of the Las Vegas attack, country artists were asked to comment about gun control, especially those artists present during the attack – many were silent about the clear gun issue. Jason Aldean, who was present on stage during the attack, took to social media to express his thoughts but completely disregarded guns being the issue at hand. He wrote, “At the end of the day we aren’t Democrats or Republicans, Whites or Blacks, Men or Women. We are all humans and we are all Americans and its time to start acting like it and stand together as ONE!” However, Caleb Keeter, the guitarist for the Josh Abbott Band which also performed at Route 91, clearly stated his thoughts on the matter. According to Deena Zaru of *CNN*, Keeter wrote on social media, “I’ve been a proponent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment my entire life. Until the events of last night. I cannot express how wrong I was.... We need gun control RIGHT. NOW.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Billboard*. October 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, Joe. *The Guardian*, April 2016

<sup>4</sup> Zaru, Deena. *CNN*, October 2017.

With high profile country music events such as the CMAs coming soon, one can hope that gun control will not be able to be ignored in the country music community for much longer.

Concert security is a necessity that cannot be ignored, as one too many tragedies have occurred as the result. However, though many venues can certainly review and act upon the lack of preventive measures, supporting efforts to enact gun control reform must be the music industry's top priority. It is the music industry's responsibility to ensure that they are doing everything they can to protect the people that support it.

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